



*State of Tennessee
Department of Children's Services*

Documentation of the Family Functional Assessment Process

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The Family Functional Assessment (FFA) Process

Definition: An ongoing process that uses the case management skill of family engagement to gather and analyze information and identify family strengths and underlying needs, so that the family and its supportive child and family team can make knowledgeable decisions that will result in safety and permanency.

The FFA is designed to support the DCS Practice Wheel, the Guiding Principles of Tennessee child welfare practice, and high-quality casework. The FFA process integrates many key components of the practice model and unifies many DCS efforts to help families succeed -- understanding and analyzing risk and safety concerns; reducing trauma to children by the assessment of placement needs; assessing family interactions through visitation; analyzing safety risk to the community; understanding the physical, emotional, educational, and vocational needs of the child, youth, parent and/or other family member; and clarifying resource needs.

The FFA

- is family centered, strength-based, and culturally responsive
- is an ongoing case management process
- leads to a shared understanding among family team members
- targets better planning for children and families
- occurs before, during, and after child and family team meetings
- identifies signs of safety and signs of risk
- recognizes that behavior is an expression of underlying need
- identifies family strengths and solutions
- keeps the focus on safety, permanence, and well-being
- identifies resource strengths and gaps

Steps in the Family Functional Assessment Process

The first step in the assessment process is gathering information from the family. The CPS Investigator (CPSI) will focus on the information needed to conduct a thorough investigation and reach an appropriate classification. If custody is necessary, the case will be transferred to an FSW. The Court Liaison may initiate the FFA and then transfer it to the FSW. The CPS Assessment worker (CPSA) (non-custody cases) and Family Service Worker (FSW) (custody cases) begin their involvement by listening to and understanding the family's story. They assist the family in identifying others who can be a part of the family team and who can assist in the information gathering process. All team members contribute with informal and formal information that is shared with the family and the team.

The next step in the assessment process is for the CPSA or FSW, with supervisory support, to sort out the information gathered and bring it to the team for analysis. The team begins to use the information to develop plans and make decisions with the family, using the family's functional strengths to overcome their needs. The assessment process is intended to assist the family in focusing their energy on family-developed and team-developed solutions. The process will also assist the family and their team in formulating a family assessment that includes environmental, cultural, religious/spiritual, and educational/vocational strengths, skills, and special interests.

As the family progresses toward safety and permanency, the team continues to use the assessment process to seek missing information, receive information from external

evaluations and records, create a long-term view with the family, prioritize needs, find strengths and resources to be used in planning, and to draw conclusions from available information.

The work that the family and their team have done in understanding the family's strengths and needs and the team's vision for the family's change process is captured as it evolves -- using the FFA document.

Purpose of the Family Functional Assessment Process

The purpose of the FFA process is

1. to engage the family in the development of a mutual understanding of what is working and what is not working;
2. to build supportive teams for youth and their families which will last beyond agency and court involvement; and
3. to gather information that leads to the development of individualized plans which utilize family strengths and solutions to overcome their needs.

The Family Functional Assessment II (CS-0777) is the place to record the pertinent information obtained about the child, family, and the community in which they live. Through appropriate updates, the FFA will capture the past, present, and future of a family. The FFA document will eventually serve a number of important administrative functions:

- As historical documentation for child and family teams to gain a shared understanding of the family story;
- As a document which identifies resources and strengths to be used for the development of plans and strategies to overcome barriers to permanency;
- As an informational document for service providers;
- As an aid in developing a program plan for youth adjudicated as delinquent;
- As an aid in developing a non-custodial plan for child protective services cases;
- As an aid in developing a Permanency Plan;
- As an aid in developing an Interdependent Living Plan; and
- As an informational document in termination and adoption cases.

The FFA document is the evidence of the successful engagement of family members in a meaningful, professional social work relationship intended to assist the child and family towards improved functioning and, in the case of delinquent youth, in curtailing delinquent behavior.

Documenting the Family Functional Assessment Process

If a case is transferred (custodial or non-custodial), the initiating worker will electronically send the FFA to the receiving worker so that ongoing documentation can continue. All DCS workers using the FFA document are responsible for gathering information about the child and family using strengths-based, family-centered, solution-focused interviewing; analyzing the information for risk and safety to the family and the community; drawing conclusions and making decisions with the child and family team; and presenting the results in an organized and objective written format. All assessments are carried out in a culturally sensitive way, without bias or prejudice, and recognizing important family values and traditions.

Interviews should be conducted with all available sources, e.g., relatives, neighbors,

teachers, pastors, mental health professionals, doctors, and any agency workers who have served the family or children. Before a case worker conducts an interview with any family member or team member, the worker should **prepare** for the interview -- have a clear focus for the interview, yet be flexible enough to allow the interview to proceed as the family or team member would like. Juvenile Justice workers may want to explore the youth's reaction to being in custody, what motivated him/her to commit delinquent acts, whether or not the youth takes personal responsibility for his/her actions, etc. Workers should not feel limited to asking only the suggested questions in this manual. Ask any thing else that might provide a more accurate and detailed picture of the family and youth.

Collateral documentation may be obtained through medical records, mental health records/evaluations, juvenile court records, police reports, school records, and reports from other agencies or departments that have had contact with the child/youth or family. When diagnostic psychiatric, medical, or psychological terminology is used in the FFA document, include an explanation of the diagnostic statement based upon the team's understanding of the information.

When the team recognizes a newly identified strength, an improved ability or coping skill, a solution to a problem, or a new risk, concern or indication of an underlying need, documentation should occur in the FFA document. Delinquent youth who are participating in a program should have their progress documented in the FFA when a program report is received. **At a minimum, the FFA should be updated at least on a quarterly basis.**

Saving a Child's FFA File

Since the FFA is a document that is stored as a Word file, the following file name format has been suggested to ensure proper case file identification:

{child's last name}_{child's first name}_{child's middle initial}_{Region}

Examples: Jones_Charles_J_Knox
(a FFA for Charles J Jones in Knox Region)

Parker_Le'Mark_A_Ham
(a FFA for Le'Mark A Parker in Hamilton Region)

Region abbreviations to use:

Region	Abbreviation	Region	Abbreviation
Davidson	Dav	Northwest	NW
East	East	Shelby	Shelby
Hamilton	Ham	South Central	SC
Knox	Knox	Southeast	SE
Mid-Cumberland	MC	Southwest	SW
Northeast	NE	Upper Cumberland	UC

Entry Dates Within the FFA Document

When entries are made within the document, it will be necessary for staff to manually type the date of entry. This is needed to identify the changes over time in the ongoing assessment process.

Questions/Statements That May Be Helpful With the FFA Process and Family Engagement

Current Circumstances

- From this referral/ court order you can see how others view things. Tell me your perspective on what has occurred?
- How would you describe what is happening in your family as a result of the problem/issue/delinquent charges?
- How do you explain what you did?
- How do you think your child would explain what happened?
- Can you tell me about times when things have been going well in your family/child?
- What was different about the times when you felt that you handled the situation well with your child?
- Who can help you with these issues?
- For delinquent cases – official version of the present charge(s); what risk does the youth present to the community.

Assessment of Family Strengths and Needs/Risks

- We have been talking about some serious matters. To give me a more balanced view, can you tell me some of the good qualities of your family/child/children?
- If you were describing yourself to others, what sort of things would you say you are good at?
- What do you most want me to know about your family?
- Can you remember a time when there was a crisis how you were able to handle it?
- Tell me about some of your parenting successes.

Historic Information

- What do you like about being a parent?
- What do you like about your child?
- What do you like about your [mother] [father]?
- Prior CPS referrals, including dates and classifications.
- Prior DCS custody episodes, including dates and circumstances.
- Delinquent history, including dates, charges, court, and final dispositions.
- Tell me about a time when you felt good about spending time with your child.
- Do you have any family routines which are important for your children to continue to follow?
- Tell me about your family holidays. How are birthdays celebrated in your family?
- Tell me about a typical daily routine. How do you get the children fed clothed and off to school? How do you get the children to bed?
- Describe child's development.
- How old was child when he/she walked? Talked?

Assessment of Safety

- What happens when someone in your house gets angry? When [this] happens, what do you do?
- How do you define “safe?”
- What do you do to keep your family safe?
- What has stopped you in the past from doing [this]?
- How do you keep your children safe?
- When you are out with your friends, what kinds of things do you do to keep yourself safe?
- How safe do you feel in your environment/home?
- What needs to change to make you feel safer?
- Tell me about a time when you haven’t felt safe in your home? What was going on that made you feel not safe?
- When you are not with your child, does your child do things that make you worry about his/her safety?
- On a scale of 1 to 10 how safe do you feel?
- What positive things do you get from your relationship with your partner?
- Who makes the important decisions in your family?
- What do you (and your partner) do for a break?
- How much time do you spend with family? Friends? Alone?
- In many families, the mother does not experience as much safety as she wants. On a scale of 1 to 10, where 10 is safe and 1 is not safe, how safe do you feel in your home?
- Have you ever left because of violence in your home? If yes, where did you go? What gave you the courage to do this? How long were you gone?
- We all have ways of dealing with stress, like running, talking with a friend... and there also are negative ways for dealing with stress. For example, sometimes we eat too much or sleep too much or drink too much, what are helpful ways and negative ways you deal with stress?
- Do you know/suspect your child is drinking/using drugs?
- Tell me about the use of drug/or alcohol in your family. How do you think this has affected you? Or your child? What did you do to handle this?
- When was there a time that you thought your child would “get high” with friends, and did not? What did (he/she) do that time?
- Describe a time when you wanted to get high, but you didn’t. What helped you through that time?
- Has your child’s behavior changed significantly in the past six months? How do you account for this change?
- You said you have quit before. How did you manage to do that?
- Has anyone in your family ever thought you might have a problem with drugs or alcohol?
- When you are out with your friends, what things do you do to make sure you are safe?

Child:

- Have you ever run away from home? Where did you go? Have you ever thought of running away but didn't? What stopped you?
- Many kids tell me that when things are difficult they feel like escaping somehow. What kinds of things do you do to escape tough times?

Assessment of Well Being

- What 3 words describe your child/children?
- What are the good things that will come from your current situation?
- What is working now? What is making a difference?
- How do you ask for help from others when you need it?
- Tell me about your child's friends.
- How does your child interact with authority figures?
- How does your family have fun together?
- Have you ever had a vacation? Where do you go for vacation?
- Tell me about your other children.
- If I asked your neighbors to describe your family what would they say?
- What kinds of changes in your child's behavior have you noticed?
- What are some things that you wish your family did together?
- Have you ever done something and then later worried about the consequences that could have followed?
- You have been parenting for # years now, so can you tell me what you are most proud of? What brings a smile to your face?
- This is a difficult time. How are you managing to keep it all together?
- What would your children say they like best about your parenting style.
- How are rules about behavior decided upon in the family?
- What do you want to happen so you see yourself as a success with your son?
- How do you know when you need a break?
- What do you do when your child does not behave or breaks a family rule?
- How did you discipline your children when they were younger?
- When you talk with your child about school, what does he/she tell you?
- Does your child have an IEP? If so, when was the last M-Team meeting?
- What were your experiences in school? How has this influenced your role in your child's education?
- What do you think your child needs to feel more confident?
- If child has quit, when did he/she quit?
- What grade was child in?
- What do you like best about your job? How flexible is your work when it comes to your children?
- If unemployed, why?
- Are there things about your job that you wish you could change?
- If you could do what you really wanted to be doing for a career, what would that be?

- What does your pediatrician say about the success your child has experienced?
- Describe child's current health. What do you do to keep your child so healthy?
- Do you have insurance, a doctor or clinic you trust?
- Are you taking any medications? What health issues are these medications helping you to deal with?
- Tell me about any health problems.
- Does your child have any medical limitations or special medical needs or treatment
- If you could change one thing about your physical health, what would it be?
- What would help you to manage that pain more effectively?
- Tell me about any serious accidents or illnesses your child has had during childhood?
- Did the child ever display early childhood behavioral problems or unusual habits? Tell me about your child's eating? How about sleeping? Has there been any change?
- Have you ever had a vacation? Where did you go? What did you do?
- I can see why you are depressed. What do you suppose might help you be a little less depressed?
- What might it look like if your child was "like his/her peers?"
- How do your children express their feelings?
- What do you think you need to make your life better?
- What do you want right now?
- What do you need from others when you are having a difficult time?

Child:

- Describe yourself in 3 sentences.
- What do you like to do with your parents/family/friends?
- Do you have any special talents?
- What would you like to do when you get older?
- What do you and your family do for fun?
- Who do you admire the most? What would help you to follow in their footsteps?
- What are the qualities of a good friend?
- Tell me about your pets. What do you do to take care of them?
- What do you like about school?
- What class(es) do you have the most success in?
- Who helps or has helped you experience success with _____ (various school subjects)?
- Tell me about any work related training you have had or are interested in.
- What do you want to do when you grow up?
- If you had three wishes, what would you want to have happen with your schooling?
- Which classes do you wish you could do better in?
- Tell me about any difficulties you have in school, such as absences or disciplinary issues.
- What would you like to do to complete your education?

Assessment of Permanence

- What makes ____ (family member) unique?
- Do you identify with one or more cultural groups?
- How do people help each other out in this family? What is the role of other family members in helping your family?
- What goals do you have for your children/family?
- How would ____ say you've been helpful to them?
- For a special celebration, where do you go? Who celebrates with you?
- Who do you go to when you need help with something?
- In the past, what has your (sister, neighbor, mother, grandparent, in-law) done that you found helpful?
- How does the family discuss issues that come up?
- Is there an adult outside your family that you have a connection with or who could be a support to your family?
- Describe relationships between the family members.
- What is something that you missed out on that you would like to see your children doing?
- What role does your (mother, sister, extended family) have in your family?
- How would you like your relationship with ____ to be different?
- How can ____ (family member) be helpful to you?
- What would you wish that your extended family would do for you that they are not doing now?
- What types of things do you disagree about in your family?
- Who else is concerned about what is happening in your family right now?
- Have/will any of your extended family members/friends take(n) care of ____ (child)? If yes, who?
- What do you like most about where your child is right now?
- Are there any family members who your child could live with?
- Where do you want to see your family eight months to one year from now?
- What do you want your family to accomplish over the next year?
- What would tell you it is time for your child to come home?
- What needs to be different?
- What would your child/mother/father/ grandfather say needs to change?
- How can ____ be helpful to you? How do you want to work with your child's foster parents? Group home childcare worker?
- Has your child ever lived somewhere other than with you? Tell me about those experiences.
- When was there a time in your life that you would have said, "life is pretty stable right now?"
- Where have you lived the past few years?

- Tell me about your past marriages. (mother and father)
- Tell me about a change in your life that was difficult. How did you deal with that change?
- Have any of the siblings received services from DCS or other agencies?
- Tell me about your past legal problem? Who helped you with them?
- On a scale of 1 to 10, with 1 being totally dependent on someone and 10 being self-sufficient, where would you rate yourself?
- What can DCS do to help you become more self-sufficient?
- What would you like to accomplish over the next year to become more self-sufficient?
- Who do you see as a caring adult in helping you achieve self-sufficiency? How will this person be supportive?

Child:

- What do you like the most about where you are currently living?
- With whom would you most like to live?
- What do you think is going well for you in this placement?
- How do you get along with the other kids or family members or caregivers?
- On a scale of 1 to 10 how well do you think this foster home/group home/placement is helping you with your family, school, health? What do you think would make it 1 point better?
- What do you think you could do to make it 1 point better?
- What would make your current living situation better?
- What would make this one point better for you?

Assessment of Resources

- What about your home or neighborhood is good for your family?
- Do you feel safe in your neighborhood?
- Tell me how you make your budget last to the end of the month.
- How long has the family been at the current residence?
- If you could change something about your home or neighborhood, what would it be?
- How many times has the family moved in the last five years?
- Are community resources accessible to you?
- Is the area considered high or low crime?
- How many people reside in the home?
- I hear you speaking another language with your children. Who helped you learn English? Who helps you with reading or writing?
- How do you think of your family culturally? What is important to you and your family?

- What would you want me to know about your spiritual beliefs?
- Where do you go in your community for assistance?
- Who in your neighborhood can you go to for help?
- What makes you feel connected to your neighborhood?
- Would it be helpful to you if services were provided in _____
[language]?
- Tell me about your transportation needs, ... who helps you get to the grocery store (or church, doctor visits)?
- What would help you be able to practice your beliefs or values more?
- How do your child's/adolescent's values differ from yours?
- What does somebody else do for your family that you feel good about?
- What kind of support does your family (or neighbors, friends) provide?
- What services in the past helped your family?
- How do you get you to where you need to go?
- How do you contact others?
- With whom do you want to be working better?
- What would it look like if your family were working with you?

Child:

- How do you find private time for yourself?
- Who is your best friend?
- What do you do for fun in you neighborhood?
- Did the court order restitution? If yes, to whom and what amount?
- Was public service work ordered? If yes, how much?